Web Buyer

Study Buddies

These sites have the tools you need for school at prices that will earn you extra credit.

BY KEVIN SAVETZ

There's one thing you should learn before you hit the hallowed halls of higher education: Preparing for college means more than stocking up on Jolt cola and Cheetos. With that in mind, we've rounded up sites that offer great deals on back-to-school essentials.

Even in the Internet age, good old textbooks are still a key (not to mention expensive) part of any college education. Whether your curriculum includes quantum physics, Shakespearean sonnets, or the analysis of Beatles lyrics, you'll need a stack of books. Fortunately, online bookstores provide an alternative to pricey, overcrowded campus bookstores. **VarsityBooks.com *(www.varsitybooks.com)*** offers discounts on new textbooks, giving you the opportunity to shave a few dollars off the college store's bloated prices.

If you'd rather forgo tomes with crisp, unturned pages for extra beer money (we would), save big bucks by buying used books. Check out **BigWords.com *(www.bigwords.com)***, a handy price-comparison tool that scours the Web for the best prices on used textbooks. Search by title, author, or ISBN, but remember to order well before classes begin; depending on the seller, shipping can take a week or more. And after you've lugged those volumes around all semester, BigWords.com will show you the sites that will buy your books back *and* offer you the most money. You could also try **BooksIntoCash.com *(www.booksintocash.com)***, where you'll get free shipping and instant-cash offers with same-day payment in exchange for used books.

Covering your books is a first-week-of-school tradition that probably dates back to the days when your great-grandparents walked to school 10 miles uphill in the snow. **Book-Ease *(www.book-ease.com)*** offers a fun and easy alternative to all that measuring, cutting, and taping that comes with brown-bag book covers. The site sells stretchable, reusable cloth book jackets in expressive colors and prints. A screaming chartreuse or psychedelic "multipaisley" cover will at least help keep you awake for the duration of a three-hour ethics lecture.

Score the ever-important inflatable couch—along with other essentials—at StudentMarket.com.

While you'll still probably spend most of your study time hitting the books, software is increasingly becoming an essential learning tool. Luckily, a number of online stores offer students and faculty members deep academic discounts. **Journey Ed.com *(www.journeyed.com)***, **Micro Master Software *(www.micromasteronline.com)***, **SmartSoft *(www.studentdiscounts.com)***, and **CCV Software *(www.ccvsoftware.com)*** all promise significant student discounts on software from major publishers. At press time, the best price we found for Adobe Photoshop 6.0 was 60 percent lower than Amazon.com's price. But don't try pulling a fast one if you're not actually enrolled, because all these sites require proof that you are indeed a student.

And don't forget to stockpile school supplies such as shiny new binders, pens, pencils, and notebook paper. Online office-supply stores including **OfficeDepot *(www.officedepot.com)***, **OfficeMax.com *(www.officemax.com)***, and **Staples.com *(www.staples.com)*** traditionally extend special deals to students in the fall. But remember to check out smaller sites like **Office.com *(www.office.com)*** and **CheapOfficeSupplies.com *(www.cheapofficesupplies.com)***, where you can also find exceptional bargains.

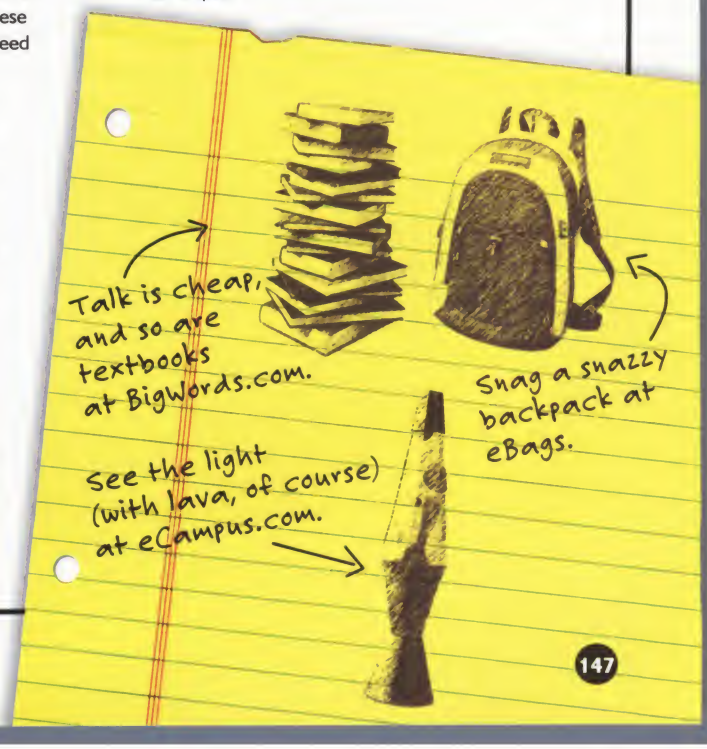
How will you lug all this stuff while sprinting a mile across campus to make that 8 a.m. class? Easy: **eBags *(www.ebags.com)*** boasts a bounty of book bags and backpacks. Browse by type, like leather-bottom or cool urban-style bags, or by price. You'll also find cases for your laptop computer. The site's case finder will help uncover a carrier that's just the right size for your portable PC.

If you're looking for a fun way to carry your lunch, remember that you don't have to be in grade school to appreciate a good lunchbox. **LunchboxShop.com *(www.lunchboxshop.com)*** serves up dozens of metal and plastic styles for grown-up students. If you're feeling retro and have extra cash, check the site's catalog of vintage lunchboxes. Choose among the likes of E.T. and Buck Rogers for a fun lunch date for the semester.

Dorm life might not be complete without **eCampus.com *(www.ecampus.com)***, a site offering dorm-room essentials like posters, lava lamps, and other furnishings. **Student Market.com's *(www.studentmarket.com)*** diverse selection includes art supplies, test-preparation software, and trendy inflatable furniture. (How could you possibly make it through four-plus years without a plastic blow-up couch?)

If you plan on goofing off all semester, there's no need to panic when exam time rolls around. Sharpen your number two pencils and point your browser to **Cram Info Online *(www.cram.com)***, a site that promises last-minute assistance for even the worst of procrastinators. You'll find course exams from actual universities for sale, along with downloadable cram notes for a variety of popular college courses and more than 300 laminated cheat sheets on topics ranging from foreign languages to chemistry. After all, you never know when a pocket-size periodic table will come in handy.

Have you been paying attention? There *will* be a quiz. ▼


Talk is cheap, and so are textbooks at BigWords.com.
Snag a snazzy backpack at eBags.
See the light (with lava, of course) at eCampus.com.

WebBuyer

SITE REVIEWS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING

BY KEVIN SAVETZ

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<Tech Shopping

aberdeeninc.com

Targeting the savvy consumer who craves speeds and feeds, **Aberdeen** offers extensive specs on a wide variety of computers and accessories. Shoppers can see side-by-side comparisons of motherboards the company carries.

accessmicro.com

Need a gift for that special someone who has everything? Check out **Access Micro,** which stocks tons of items ranging from T1 routers to complete desktop systems. The help desk and hardware guide provide aid to first-time visitors, and the clearance area offers returned items and old inventory for below wholesale cost.

www.applied-computer.com

Selling PCs and supplies since 1984, **Applied Computer** promises to beat any advertised price. The company features an 80,000-product inventory; check the site's list of the 1,000 most popular ones. But beware of the handling fee tacked onto orders under $200.

blackbox.com

Get connected! Specializing in network products, **Black Box's** extensive 900-page catalog of storage, cabling, and surge-protection products—plus other connectivity accessories—can be viewed online or off.

buy.com

This monstrous, multifaceted site sells computers, electronics, books, movies, and more. With a whopping 850,000 items, **Buy.com** offers a price-matching policy on most of them.

cablestogo.com

Cables To Go sells every conceivable cable you might need for your PC, from standard SCSI to esoteric system-specific cables. You'll also find networking products, bulk cable, tools, and test equipment. You might even get lucky and snatch up what you need at a bargain price in the site's closeout section.

www.cd-recordable.com

The U.S-owned and -based **CD-Recordable Factory Store** actually manufactures the discs it sells. This easy-to-navigate site stocks a massive variety of CD-R discs, including colorless and tinted media, plus disc-packaging and -storage accessories.

cdw.com

CDW offers an enormous array of hardware and software for business. Create side-by-side comparisons in many product categories, and search out dollar-saving deals on the rebates-and-coupons page.

compgeeks.com

Revenge of the nerds, indeed! Shop the **Computer Geeks Discount Outlet** for new, discontinued, and refurbished computer gear. It's a trove for the do-it-yourselfer piecing together a desktop system. The site features low prices and complete specs on every product.

compuplus.com

Comp-U-Plus offers free technical support and a 30-day money-back guarantee on all the peripherals it sells. The catalog isn't exactly earth-shattering in scope, but the prices are reasonable, and plenty of name brands are represented.

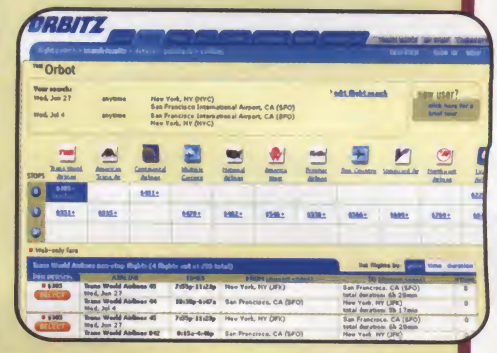
SEPTEMBER

COMPUTER SHOPPER site OF THE month

orbitz.com

Savvy travelers have been buying airline tickets online for years using self-service travel sites like Expedia and Travelocity.com. It was only a matter of time before the airlines figured out how to cut out the middleman and take advantage of the Web themselves.

Orbitz is the brainchild of five airlines (American, Continental, Delta, Northwest, and United), but it's not limited to those; the site sells tickets for more than 450 carriers. Navigation and ease of use are average as far as travel sites go, but the most notable advantage is price. In our tests, Orbitz airfare prices were almost always less expensive than the prices on other travel sites. The site also takes advantage of the latest fare-finding technology to offer more arrival, departure, and stopover options.



If you're craving a weekend getaway but don't care much where you go, use the Find Web Fares feature on the Deals page. Enter your departing airport, click "this weekend" or "next weekend," and the site will serve up a list of cheap fares to...wherever.

While the main attraction at Orbitz is the flight finder, you can also snag deals on hotel rooms, rental cars, cruises, or full travel packages.

SITE REVIEWS

compusa.com

The well-organized **CompUSA** rounds out the usual selection of PC hardware, peripherals, and accessories with areas devoted to electronics and gadgets. The frugal won't want to overlook the site's outlet section.

computergate.com

In business since 1991, **Computer Gate** promises a 30-day satisfaction return policy on its products, which include peripherals and build-to-order PCs. Check out the Quick Index: You'll never have to poke around for the right product again.

computers4sure.com

In the 19 well-stocked departments at **Computers4Sure.com** you'll find a broad spectrum of products including networking equipment, projectors, PDAs, scanners, and more. Bargain hunters can quickly sniff out deals on the Clearance pages.

computershopper.com

Computer Shopper's own piece of cyberspace, **computershopper.com,** provides access to product reviews, interactive guides to choosing a desktop or a notebook, and How to Buy sections for the most popular product categories. The site can also help you find an ISP, ASP, or Web host.

www.computersurplusoutlet.com

You're just crazy enough to build your own desktop system, aren't you? Then you'll feel right at home at **Computer Surplus Outlet,** where you'll find closeouts, overstocks, refurbished equipment, and liquidation items. You can even stumble upon the occasional assembly-required Pentium system for less than $100.

crucial.com

One of the largest providers of memory upgrades on the Web, **Crucial Technology** offers free shipping on RAM upgrades for 11,000 computer systems. The site's Memory Selector helps buyers find the right product, and the company backs its memory with a lifetime warranty.

cyberwarehouse.com

If you can't pass up a bargain-basement sale (and don't mind waiting a few days for your item to ship), **CyberWarehouse** is definitely for you. The site offers a small selection of PCs, monitors, and peripherals.

dalco.com

Dalco Electronics stocks everything from motherboards to monitors, ships them the day you order, and includes a 30-day guarantee. Bargain hunters will want to start with the specials found on the home page, which change regularly.

dartek.com

With a roster of more than 100,000 products, **Dartek** peddles an impressive selection of hardware, software, networking equipment, and office furniture. Well-designed features include printable spec sheets, customers' product ratings, a product-watch feature, and a frequent-buyers' club.

directron.com

Specializing in computer peripherals, **Directron.com** offers low prices on a wide variety of name-brand and OEM products. Most items include a 30-day guarantee, and any order earns you the right to pick through the Free Stuff bin. Savvy savers will appreciate the Clearance area, as well as frequent-customer and volume-purchasing discounts.

dirtcheapdrives.com

If you can store data on it, this site sells it. **Dirt Cheap Drives** offers hard drives, CD-ROM and DVD hardware, and drive arrays, with detailed technical information about each product. This decade-old company also stocks mounting kits, media, and accessories.

ebatts.com

Is your notebook or UPS battery running out of juice? **eBatts.com** specializes in batteries for laptops, uninterruptible power supplies, mobile phones, and camcorders. Check out the site's battery tips area for info about battery life, maximizing performance, and recycling old batteries.

ecost.com

The **eCost.com** catalog spans the full range of PC hardware and software, including ready-to-use systems, peripherals, accessories, and applications. The site features fastidious organization and personalized product recommendations.

egghead.com

Egghead.com shoppers can lose themselves in the site's hardware, software, office-product, and electronics superstores. Corporate users will find volume pricing, leasing information, and software licensing in the business center.

elinux.com

At **eLinux** you'll find a whopping 42,000 hardware and software products. The site is so serious about Linux, many of its desktop and notebook systems don't come bundled with that "other" OS. Special offerings include Linux news and a community forum.

emscomputing.com

EMS Computing offers a 40,000-product catalog, an easy-to-navigate site, and low shipping charges. A monthly newsletter delivers informative tips on choosing and using computer accessories.

fwdepot.com

FireWire Depot serves up IEEE 1394 (FireWire) stuff for your compatible computer. The site's selection includes drives, cases, cables, and IEEE 1394 upgrade cards. The buyer's guide provides insightful answers to frequently asked fiery questions.

harddrive.com

Pack rat? **HardDrive.com** has your storage solution. Choosy shoppers will find extensive choices in IDE, SCSI, and IEEE 1394 (FireWire) drives, along with other peripherals. For fashion-forward computer users, the site offers an array of black PC components, from cases to scanners. After all, black *does* go with everything.

hypermicro.com

Hyper Microsystems specializes in storage. The catalog includes CD-ROM and CD-RW drives, tape backup drives, hard drives, and RAID adapters. Check the Hyper Bundles for ready-to-use RAID and CD-RW starter kits.

igo.com

iGo calls itself a "mobile technology outfitter." Use the site to outfit your cell phone, laptop, or PDA with chargers, batteries, and other necessary accessories. The iGo Alerts feature delivers free customized news to your portable device.

insight.com

With more than 110,000 items for sale, **Insight** offers an impressive catalog of hardware and software. Customized sites are available for shoppers in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

jandr.com

Hardware, software, home-office products, and appliances abound at **J&R Computer World,** the New York City-based superstore famed for its selection and, ahem, "brusque" service. Avoid the attitude with this online version, which specializes in cameras, both digital and traditional film models. Product help is available via e-mail, online chat, and *phone.*

SITE REVIEWS

lanblvd.com

Wrestling with your old router? Network card not working? **LanBlvd.com** specializes in networking products. You'll find hubs, routers, interface cards, and wireless stations, along with other essentials for your LAN.

laptoptravel.com

Laptop Travel is road-warrior heaven! The site sells portable-computing and international-travel gear, including electrical adapters, modem converters/couplers, and security accessories. You'll find traditional and "camouflaged" laptop carrying cases, laptop RAM, and storage add-ons.

linuxcentral.com

Find your alternative at **Linux Central.** The site stocks Linux-friendly hardware, commercial software, and operating-system CD-ROMs. A selection of Linux-compatible T-shirts, hats, and ties will help you flash your alternative tendencies in public.

mcglen.com

McGlen Micro's specialized searches can help you find memory and other accessories compatible with your computer, printer, or copier. With the Build-To-Order Configurator, shoppers can design a custom system, which the company will configure and ship to you in two days.

megahaus.com

MegaHaus bills itself the "drive authority," offering a wide variety of storage solutions, including hard drives, DVD drives, RAID arrays, and CD-mastering products.

mei-microcenter.com

MEI-Micro Center offers new and refurbished desktops from Compaq, eMachines, Hewlett-Packard, and PowerSpec. You'll also find a small selection of peripherals. Rummage through the bargain bin for deals on closeouts, refurbished units, and overstocks.

memman.com

All of the desktop and laptop memory sold at **Memory Man** carries a lifetime warranty, and the site's reference guide offers RAM-configuration info for all name-brand computers. The site also sells processors, motherboards, hard drives, heat sinks, and more for the intrepid system builder.

memory4less.com

Memory4Less.com offers low prices on a wide variety of RAM, including older types you may have been pulling your hair out to find. If you don't know the memory requirements of your computer or digital camera, this site will clue you in.

microx-press.com

MicroX-Press offers detailed information about most of the products it sells. The site will send you an e-mail whenever a product's price drops below a limit you set. Customers are invited to rate and review products they've tried.

www.mobile-mania.com

Quickly head to **Mobilemania.com** for digital cameras, e-mail devices, PDAs, cases, and adapters. You'll find the bountiful selection a haven for folks (like you) who are always on the go.

mobileplanet.com

MobilePlanet is home to a gaggle of high-tech tools and toys for mobile professionals. The selection includes handheld and notebook computers, PDAs, wireless-communication products, and travel-size printers and scanners.

mobilizenow.com

On the go? *Gear up at* **MobilizeNow,** where you'll find the gadgets you need, including GPS receivers, portable radios, and cellular and PDA accessories. Tell the site what country you're headed for, and it will spit out a list of appropriate adapter plugs, phone adapters, and voltage converters.

monitoroutlet.com

From inexpensive 14-inchers to elegant (and pricey) flat-panel LCDs, **Monitor Outlet** offers a wide range of displays. The site sells units from 24 manufacturers, with quick-comparison pages to help you choose. The catalog also includes specialty monitors such as touch screens, wide-aspect-ratio displays, and projectors.

Used and Refurbished Computer Components

baber.com

Looking for an inexpensive portable PC? Check out **Baber.com,** which sells used laptops for as little as $250. You may have to invest in a new battery, since used batteries for portables are not covered by the site's usual 30-day warranty.

electrified.com

Electrified Discounters offers a large inventory of refurbished, used, discontinued, and off-lease desktops, notebooks, and peripherals. Choices include Pentium III laptops, ancient 486s, even digital cameras and monitors. The site provides information about each product, but it can be difficult to navigate.

liquidationstation.com

Liquidation Station sells used and refurbished Macintosh and PC systems, printers, and monitors. You'll find complete specs on most items, and the site is forthcoming about imperfections such as scratches and bad batteries.

pcplanet.net

PC Planet delivers quality preowned laptops from major manufacturers. The selection is small, but you'll find plenty of information about each product, including technical specs and physical condition.

refurbdepot.com

The RefurbDepot.com offers refurbished computers, electronics, and office equipment from name-brand manufacturers. The site offers a good selection, and most products include a standard manufacturers' warranty.

usedcomputer.com

The Used Computer Mall sells refurbished PCs from IBM, Compaq, Dell, and other manufacturers. You can get the best deal by choosing a unit with cosmetic flaws. The selection also includes servers, PDAs, and monitors.

used-pcs.com

Used-PCs.com sells preowned desktops, notebooks, monitors, and accessories. Buy a CPU only, or a complete Internet-ready system for the computer novice in your life. The prices are low, but buyers can't be too picky: For instance, you can get a 15-inch monitor for $59, but you can't choose the brand or model.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BILL RIESER

SITE REVIEWS

motherboardexpress.com

Oh, Mama. **Motherboard Express** was made for PC-building connoisseurs. Shoppers can filter the selection of 100-plus boards by manufacturer, chipset, processor type, case type, onboard controller, or number of CPUs.

motherboards.com

With a wide selection of motherboards from nine manufacturers, do-it-yourselfers will revel in handpicking the perfect innards for their new PCs at **Motherboards.com.** Order a motherboard and CPU together, and the company will configure and test them for you.

www.mwave.com

In addition to PC systems and peripherals, **Multiwave Direct** stocks notebook accessories, videoconferencing equipment, and network tools. Top sellers, "blowout specials," and rebate forms are a click away from the home page.

Printer Consumables and Accessories

inkcarts.com

Inkcarts.com offers inkjet and laser-printer cartridges, fax thermal ribbons, refill supplies, printer paper, and bulk ink. Searching by printer or OEM part number makes finding the right item a breeze. All products, including remanufactured and generic ink cartridges, are backed by a one-year guarantee.

inkjets.com

If your printer is putting you in the poorhouse, visit **Inkjets.com.** The site specializes in remanufactured and compatible inkjet cartridges that cost much less than name-brand ink. All cartridges include a one-year guarantee.

www.ledesktop.com

Le Desktop offers distinctive paper and envelopes that will jazz up your printer's output. The catalog includes attractive translucent, parchment, and high-gloss papers. In addition to a variety of recycled papers, you'll find unusual "tree alternative" papers made from banana peels, grass clippings, blue jeans, and seaweed.

123inkjets.com

123Inkjets specializes in generic and remanufactured inkjet cartridges. You'll also find laser toner, thermal-transfer ribbons, and paper. The Inkmail service allows you to have your inkjet cartridges professionally refilled, tested, and returned to you.

photoinkjet.com

Photoinkjet.com is a great place for fine-art inkjet papers and archival inks for the production of desktop art, photography, and large-format digital printing. The selection of archival ink is limited to Epson printers, but the professional papers will work with any brand of printer.

thirstyprinter.com

If you don't mind getting your fingers dirty to save some cash, check out **ThirstyPrinter.com.** The site sells inkjet refill kits—bottles of ink and syringes—that you can use to refill empty inkjet cartridges. You'll also find a healthy list of links to drivers for major and smaller printer manufacturers' models.

2for1inkjet.com

2 For 1 Inkjet offers two-for-one prices on toner and ink cartridges for virtually every brand of inkjet and laser printer, copier, and fax machine. But beware: Shipping can be slow, and there's no order-tracking.

webuyempties.com

Don't let your printer cartridges go to the landfill—sure they're small, but more than 200 million are thrown away annually. **We Buy Empties** pays $1 to $2 for certain depleted inkjet or laser-printer cartridges. Your old cartridges will be refilled, reused, and recycled.

neutronet.com

Neutron carries thousands of computer systems and peripherals from nearly 400 manufacturers and distributors. A handy toolbox offers easy access to best buys, help for first-time buyers, and a massive manufacturer directory.

newegg.com

You won't have to shell out big bucks or scramble for hardware at **NewEgg.com**. Peck at the site's listings of new products and top sellers, then take a crack at the specials. Order carefully—the 15 percent restocking fee might make you squawk.

www.notebooksuperstore.com

Devoted exclusively to portable computers, **NotebookSuperStore.com** sells more than 100 different laptop models from nine manufacturers. You'll see technical details about each model, and a comparison tool helps you zero in on the best portable for you.

nxgen.com

Next Generation's Web site is densely packed with prebuilt computers and peripherals ranging from cables to graphics cards. The selection is huge, and the site provides full specs and plenty of details about each product.

onvia.com

Onvia.com, a business-to-business computer outlet, offers a handful of features that distinguish it as a small-business resource, including a services marketplace, buying guides, and active community forums.

outpost.com

Outpost.com sells 170,000 products—a full range of computer hardware, plus cameras, electronics, and innovative specialty products from partner companies.

palmgear.com

Users of handhelds will appreciate the extensive selection of free and commercial programs downloadable from **PalmGear HQ.** Shoppers can buy PDA hardware and accessories, including carrying cases and hip styli. Sign up for an e-mailing list to receive information about new software, news, and user tips.

pcconnection.com

PC Connection offers nifty bargains on a colossal variety of PC and Macintosh products. Smart Selectors ease the searching process for shoppers looking for turnkey systems, cameras, printers, monitors, or memory to fit specific guidelines.

www.pcliquidator.com

The getting's good at **PC Liquidator,** a site that offers clearance, refurbished, and overstocked hardware and software. The inventory is always changing and usually inexpensive. You can find many hardware choices for under $10—some for less than $5.

SITE REVIEWS

pcmall.com

Shoppers at **PC Mall** receive free lifetime technical support on the site's vast selection of computers, hardware, and software. The site's business-solutions forum offers corporate leasing and volume pricing. Apple-heads can find all their favorite Macintosh products at the **Mac Mall** sister site ***(www.macmall.com)***.

pczone.com

PC Zone stocks an impressive selection of all things PC. You'll find links to a clearance area and other stores: **Mac Zone** and **Electronics Zone.** Printable rebate coupons can save you some cash.

provantage.com

Provantage offers PC products from more than 1,000 manufacturers, including a large selection of books and training materials. The site's Personal Tracking List feature lets customers build a list of product bookmarks, then monitor prices and availability.

7-24.com

Deal-crazy shoppers will feel at home at the **7-24 Outlet Store,** which sells computer hardware and electronics closeouts. This site is a source for hard-to-find media and accessories for SyQuest, Avatar, and Iomega Ditto drives. The electronics area offers telephones, walkie-talkies, and other gadgets.

www.sg3d.com

Sunway Graphics specializes in PC graphics cards, offering a wide selection of powerful 3D accelerators. You'll also see a smaller selection of other graphics products: TV-tuner cards, videoconferencing equipment, and video-capture cards.

shopper.cnet.com

The **CNET Shopper** search engine takes the guesswork out of finding a deal on hardware, software, and accessories. The price-drop-alerts feature will send you e-mail when the cost of a coveted gadget falls. (CNET Networks is *Computer Shopper's* parent company.)

sparco.com

Looking for that something extra? Check out **Sparco.com's** list of products that come bundled with "free stuff." The site stocks more than 130,000 products, and it offers a list of discounted items for students and faculty members of academic institutions.

ssdonline.com

At **State Street Direct,** shoppers will discover a huge selection of computers and imaging products. Digital-camera shoppers will find many items of interest, including customized comparison charts.

staples.com

Yeah, they've got that. **Staples'** Web site offers a liberal price-matching policy on computer accessories, software, and office supplies. If you order similar items often, you can set up personalized shopping lists. The company can occasionally take its time shipping items out to you, though, so beware.

tccomputers.com

In business since 1988, **TC Computers** sells fully configured systems, motherboards, and peripherals. The company's specialty is motherboards; buyers can choose to have motherboards and processors pre-assembled and tested for no extra charge.

tcwo.com

Thompson's Computer Warehouse Outlet offers only a small selection of computer products. You may find only a dozen monitors or four CD-ROM drives, but the prices are fantastic.

techstore.com

TechStore.com offers hardware in dozens of categories and highlights monthly top sellers. The site also sells software, ranging from productivity suites to children's titles.

thenerds.net

With no misgivings about the tech-savvy of its company or customers, **TheNerds.net** offers 60,000 computer products, ranging from cables and connectors to graphics cards, at its fast and friendly site. The liberal 30-day return policy will protect you from getting stuck with the wrong product.

tigerdirect.com

TigerDirect's site offers 40,000 products, including custom-built computers that are tested and shipped within 48 hours. Up for a little adventure? Order a build-it-yourself custom PC kit, and let the fun begin!

truedataonline.com

True Data Technology stocks an exceptional catalog of motherboards, hard drives, and other upgrades. The site also features communication essentials for businesses, including DSL equipment and telephony products.

usbstuff.com

USB Stuff specializes in Universal Serial Bus-equipped gadgets, including digital cameras, CD-RW drives, printers, modems, hubs, and input devices. But its poor site design makes navigation difficult. A sister site at ***www.firewirestuff.com*** stocks IEEE 1394-compatible hardware.

warehouse.com

The four "warehouses" under **MicroWarehouse's** roof sell PC hardware, Mac products, datacomm components, and supplies. The site accepts corporate, educational, and government accounts, and offers business leases on many products.

<Direct PC Vendors

www.alienware.com

Alienware won't abduct your pets, but the company can build you a high-end gaming machine, desktop video system, or high-performance workstation. Cases are available in a rainbow of out-of-this-world colors.

buyabs.com

Exceptional customer support on custom-configured desktop and notebook systems is the goal at **ABS Computer Technologies.** All systems include a 30-day money-back guarantee. Some computers are available with Linux preinstalled.

buy-atlas.com

Atlas Micro offers desktop PCs built around Pentium, Celeron, and AMD processors. Buyers can use drop-down menus to create a custom configuration and are protected by a reasonable 30-day return policy.

compaq.com

Three arms of **Compaq Computer's** site offer computers for everyone. See the Compaq AtHome division ***(athome.compaq.com)*** for home and home-office systems, DirectPlus ***(www.directplus.compaq.com)*** for business PCs and servers, or the Compaq Factory Outlet Superstore ***(compaqfactoryoutlet.com)*** for big bargains.

csd.toshiba.com

The Web home for **Toshiba's** stylish portables and desktop systems doesn't offer as many build-to-order options as some other sites, but it's loaded with plenty of extended-warranty and lease options.

cyberpowerinc.com

Each **CyberPower** PC includes a three-year warranty and 30-day money-back guarantee. The site's service area includes downloadable drivers and lifetime tech support.

dell.com

Dell Computer's electronic storefront has always led the way in ease of use. The site is jam-packed with detailed information that makes it a snap to match a machine to your needs. Each system is configurable to the nth degree via drop-down menus, and you can get quick access to online support customized for your PC.

SITE REVIEWS

www.fujitsu-pc.com

Fujitsu's site focuses on portable computing, including notebook PCs and pen-based tablet computers. Each computer includes several warranty options. A trade-in program offers cash back on your old computer when you upgrade to certain models.

gateway.com

One of the biggest players in online computer sales, **Gateway** has an enormous and informative site that sells custom-built desktops and portables, delivering them on time 98 percent of the time, according to BizRate.com.

hpshopping.com

At this site, **Hewlett-Packard** sells its lines of desktop and notebook computers, handhelds, PDAs, digital cameras, scanners, and printers. The site makes repeat purchases simple for businesses and individuals.

ibm.com/products

ShopIBM sells business and home computers, notebooks, servers, thin clients, networking equipment, and peripherals. The build-to-order option allows buyers to customize a new desktop PC. Linux is an option on laptop models.

idot.com

From low-cost budget models to powerful monster machines, **iDot** offers customized desktop and notebook computers with a good return policy.

microexpress.net

Micro Express offers built-to-order desktop and notebook computers featuring AMD and Intel processors. Each system includes a 30-day guarantee and a two- or four-year warranty. Business leases are available.

PC Cooling Products

1coolpc.com

1CoolPC specializes in fans, heat sinks, and other temperature-regulation devices for your CPU, monitor, hard drive, and other components. If you're feeling paranoid despite those additions, the site offers temperature monitors and alarms to alert you should things get too hot.

pcpowercooling.com

Keep your cool with **PC Power & Cooling.** You'll find system fans, drive coolers, card coolers, and many choices in CPU coolers. The site stocks an extensive line of PC power supplies, and an interactive tool helps you choose the right one. Check out the informative tips on maximizing airflow and minimizing operating temperature.

plycon.com

For serious overclockers (or those who compute in the Mojave desert) **Plycon's** catalog includes water-cooling kits for your PC. You'll also find heat sinks of all sizes, fan adapters, and CPU spacers for hardware hackers.

thecardcooler.com

The Card Cooler markets an astounding selection of fans and heat sinks to draw heat out of your overworked PC. Check out the computer cases specifically designed for cooling—we found one that has six built-in fans to keep your PC downright frigid.

3dcool.com

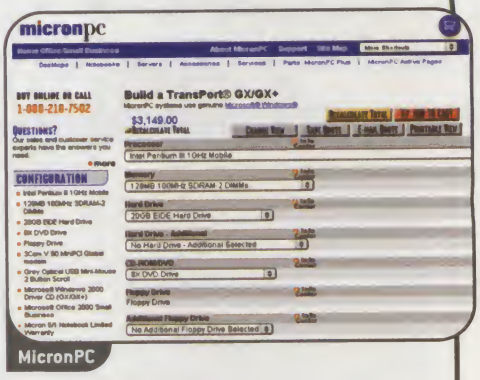
In addition to the usual selection of fans, **3DCool.com** sells unusual cooling gadgets, such as a digital thermometer that mounts in your PC's drive bay, and cooling devices for laptops. Try to keep your cool when checking out; you won't find the standard shopping-cart feature of most e-commerce sites.

2cooltek.com

2CoolTek is not only a Web store, but also a catchall resource site dedicated to the art of PC cooling. You'll find articles about the latest products and cooling hacks, a message board, and a news archive. The product selection includes video coolers, thermal compounds, fan grilles, and air filters.

micronpc.com

One of the largest direct PC vendors, **MicronPC** sells computers to home-office users, larger businesses, government buyers, and buyers outside the United States. The Factory Outlet offers refurbished and discontinued systems.



www.mwmicro.com

Go MidWest, young man. **MidWest Micro** delivers down-home, custom-configured desktops, servers, and notebook systems. The site's Service Center is exemplary, with a troubleshooting knowledge base and driver downloads that cater to your particular system.

nutrend.com

Custom-configure a home or business desktop PC at **NuTrend Computer Products.** The company stocks machines running your choice of Intel or AMD processors. Each system comes with a three-year warranty.

www.polywell.com/onlinestore

Polywell Computers may not be a household name, but the company offers desktops, workstations, and servers that are worth a look. You'll find massive custom-configuration options.

www.sagernotebook.com

Specializing in notebook computers, **Sager** offers a variety of options, from budget machines to speedy multimedia units. Service includes a 72-hour repair-turnaround guarantee and lifetime free tech support. Business leases are available.

shopprostar.com

Each computer in **ProStar Computer's** line of notebook PCs is backed by a 30-day money-back guarantee, a speedy-repair promise, and free tech support. The handy comparison tool helps buyers zero in on the best model.

sonystyle.com

SonyStyle sells Sony's line of VAIO desktops and notebooks, plus digital cameras, displays, and storage devices. The Xtras Direct section of the site carries add-ons for PCs, digital cameras, and other equipment.

store.apple.com

Apple Computer's well-designed site allows you to custom-configure any Macintosh computer and

offers a wide array of Mac-compatible software and accessories. Beware the one-click ordering feature, however—using it may be a bit too convenient for impulse buyers!

www.tiny.com/us

Britain's favorite direct computer seller is now targeting us Yanks. **Tiny Computers'** line of prebuilt desktop and notebook PCs includes models for professionals and first-time buyers.

unitedmicro.com

Take home a preconfigured Intel- or AMD-based PC, or start with a bare-bones system and let **United Micro** install the components of your choice.

www.winbook.com

Focusing exclusively on portables, **WinBook Computer** offers machines with a 30-day money-back guarantee, a one-year warranty, and free technical support. Ironically, some of the site's best deals, the daily "Web specials," can only be ordered by phone.

<PC Resources

consumerreview.com

ConsumerReview.com helps consumers research products before they buy. The site provides more than 200,000 reviews and ratings for tech gadgets and products for the home, car, and kids.

dcresource.com

The **Digital Camera Resource Page** is an unbiased, comprehensive source of information for digital-camera buyers and owners. Shoppers can glean necessary info from the FAQ page, buyer's guide, message boards, and reviews.

dealnews.com

Deal yourself in! **Dealnews** is a fantastic buyer's guide that reports on low-price specials in Web stores. Updated daily, the site discovers deals that range from tempting to nearly impossible to resist. Check out sister site **Dealmac** for Mac-oriented gotta-haves.

dealtime.com

DealTime.com is an independent comparison-shopping service. The site aggregates prices from hundreds of online merchants, auctions, and classified sites. Also, 21st-century shoppers can compare prices by cell phone or wireless PDA, thanks to the site's mobile service.

expertcity.com

Expertcity.com promises live, 24-hour computer assistance from real human beings. When you pose a question, experts across the Internet bid for your business. Read their profiles, compare prices, then choose the expert you like.

SITE REVIEWS

56k.com

See **56K.com** for a primer on 56kbps modems, a price shopper for buying a modem at the best price, and downloads of the latest firmware. Read the special report on the new V.92 modems.

www.ftc.gov

The **Federal Trade Commission's** Web site is packed with useful information about consumer fraud and how to avoid it—online and off. If you've had a problem with a merchant, you can file a complaint with the FTC Bureau of Consumer Protection online.

gomez.com

Gómez.com offers ratings and customer reviews of e-commerce sites in two dozen categories, ranging from Web-based computer stores to drugstores, apparel vendors to online brokers. Check the ratings on ease of use, customer confidence, and cost.

www.linhardware.com

Will that sleek new laptop run Linux? Find out with the **ZDNet Linux Hardware Database,** where users share their experiences regarding which hardware's compatible with Linux—and which isn't. For the stuff that is, download the appropriate driver and put it to work. (ZDNet is owned by CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company.)

motherboards.org

Motherboard HomeWorld is packed with motherboard news, reviews, specifications, and tips. Its comprehensive database of 1,200 products includes driver information, technical details, and overclocking hints.

nextag.com

NexTag is a sophisticated buying service that can help frugal shoppers find the lowest possible prices on computer equipment, electronics, books, music, and videos. Entering your ZIP code allows NexTag to calculate shipping and tax for accurate pricing.

pdastreet.com

No matter which PDA you use, there's something for you at **PDAStreet.com.** This multifaceted site delivers reviews, software downloads, user tips, and classified ads for Windows CE, Palm, Visor, Psion, and RIM users.

resellerratings.com

Want a second opinion before you share your credit-card number with an unfamiliar online merchant? Check **ResellerRatings.com,** which provides customer evaluations of online hardware vendors. Take reviews with a grain of salt: We've seen dozens of negative messages posted by one (very unhappy) person.

techsupportalert.com

Tech Support Alert helps computer users locate the best tech-support information on the Net. You'll find reviews of free and pay-for-support sites, plus how-to guides for Windows users.

windrivers.com

WinDrivers.com is a comprehensive archive of drivers and DLL files for hard drives, sound cards, scanners, and other hardware. The site also provides links to antivirus updates and BIOS upgrades.

<Software Sites

arcamax.com

Among other items, **ArcaMax** carries a selection of Windows and Mac software, most priced at $7.95—and all with free shipping. Choose from business software, clip art, games, and reference titles, with lots of options for kids and adults.

beyond.com

Beyond.com presents software for PC, Mac, and PDA users. In addition to traditional boxed titles, the site sells downloadable software from major publishers and a respectable selection of computer hardware. (CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company, is an investor in Beyond.com.)

buypcsoft.com

Buypcsoft.com offers software for Windows PCs in categories from business management to voice recognition. It's an efficient site with a good selection and high ratings among previous and current customers.

chumbo.com

In addition to tons of Windows programs and DVD movies, **Chumbo.com** features PDA software and a Linux Store that sells applications for the popular alternative OS.

compuexpert.com

If you crave games for your Mac or PC, stop by **Compuexpert.com.** The well-stocked categories include racing simulations, sports games, strategy games, and adventure titles. Colorful descriptions and multiple screenshots are given for most titles.

SITE REVIEWS

cws.internet.com

Stroud's Consummate Winsock Applications List is the ultimate one-stop download site for Internet software, including Web-development tools, browsers, and chat clients. You'll find comprehensive file lists, ratings, and extensive reviews. A free newsletter provides summaries of new software releases.

download.cnet.com

CNET Download.com will help you find shareware and free software, linking to thousands of PC, Mac, Linux, and PDA titles. Well-written newsletters and down-to-earth reviews help you to locate the perfect program. (CNET Networks is *Computer Shopper's* parent company.)

dragon.ca

When we think of Canada, three things come to mind: Mounties, ice hockey, and **The Dragon's Den.** This popular site sells video games for the PC, PlayStation, and other consoles. They're quite used to selling to their southern neighbors—prices are available in U.S. dollars, and shipping is very affordable.

ebgames.com

The online arm of the ubiquitous Electronics Boutique stores, **EBGames.com** is a video-game player's paradise, offering over 3,000 products. Its home page highlights new releases, coming-soon titles, and top sellers. Bargain hunters will love the long list of preowned titles available at significant discounts.

freewarefiles.com

Windows users who want software without having to spend any money can start at **Freeware Files.com.** This site features quick links to the most popular giveaways.

Researching a Long-Distance Calling Plan

abtolls.com

Do you know for whom the bell tolls? **ABTolls.com** is a directory of long-distance service rates, serving up comparisons of international, in-state, and state-to-state fees. Read the site's consumer advice, which includes articles on how to read your phone bill and understanding those mysterious monthly fees.

www.fcc.gov/marketsense

The **Federal Communications Commission Market Sense** page offers unbiased tips on choosing the best long-distance deals, including advice on avoiding scams. Take a moment to read the Top Ten Telecom Tips, useful and easy-to-follow guidelines to help you get the best plan.

www.ftc.gov/bcp/menu-call.htm

The **Federal Trade Commission's** consumer protection page offers helpful information for anyone who uses a telephone. Articles include "Buying Time: The Facts About Pre-Paid Phone Cards," "Long Distance Deals," and "Making Sense of Long Distance Advertising." The site also catalogs current federal telecommunications rules and acts.

smartprice.com

SmartPrice.com serves up side-by-side comparisons of long-distance carriers in your geographic area, virtually assuring that you pick the plan best suited for you. If you have a copy of a recent phone bill and a few minutes to spare, you can use the Detailed Analysis page to see which options will work best with your calling patterns.

www.1010dialaroundplans.com

This site offers comprehensive information about **10-10 Dial Around Plans,** those dialing codes that route your call through a particular long-distance carrier. If you choose the right one based on your calling patterns, you can save money. Start by reading the site's FAQ, then compare rates for national and international dial-around plans.

www.thedigest.com

Discount Long Distance Digest is a free online newsletter covering the long-distance telephone industry. The site offers consumer shopping tips and roundups of the lowest-price long-distance plans for residential and business customers.

fscentral.com

PC and Mac aviation addicts are cleared for landing at **Flight Sim Central.** The site offers a hangar full of flight-simulator software, plus specialty hardware like flight yokes and simulated avionics.

handango.com

Handango offers hundreds of commercial software downloads for Palm OS, Pocket PC, Windows CE, and RIM handhelds. Newbies can start with the site's tutorials and recommendations for first-time buyers.

jumbo.com

Jumbo is the perfect name for this monstrous file archive, which features programs for sale, commercial-application demos, shareware, and freeware. Jumbo Guides offer articles on backing up, sharing MP3s, and other computing topics.

linux2order.com

Linux2order offers more than 10,000 Linux and open-source applications. You can pick and choose software, or grab a prebuilt distribution. Get your software on a $5 custom-burned CD, as a free standard download, or as a high-speed download for a subscription fee.

999central.com

The price is right at **999central.com,** which stocks 500 software and 200 DVD titles, most for $9.99. Educational, entertainment, and lifestyle applications are the most common.

softwareoutlet.com

Calling all cheapskates! Come check it out. **SoftwareOutlet.com's** a veritable virtual bargain bin. You'll find dirt-cheap apps—older versions, titles from defunct companies, or just plain funky stuff.

www.tucows.com

It's not just bovine bliss: **Tucows** is also an incredible archive of freeware and shareware. Plenty of local mirror sites keep the download process speedy. The category list and reviews make finding the software you seek a breeze.

wiredlounge.com

Here's a site hard-core gamers will want to plug in to. **Wired Lounge** serves up recently released games for PCs and consoles. The site is packed with refreshingly honest reviews, coupled with plenty of screenshots to whet your appetite.

zdnet.com/downloads

You'll need more bandwidth. Download shareware, freeware, and demos from **ZDNet Downloads.** The site offers daily software highlights and quick links to the week's most popular software. Every program is rated, reviewed, and checked for viruses, so your new software won't come with any unpleasant surprises. (ZDNet is owned by CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company.) ▼